

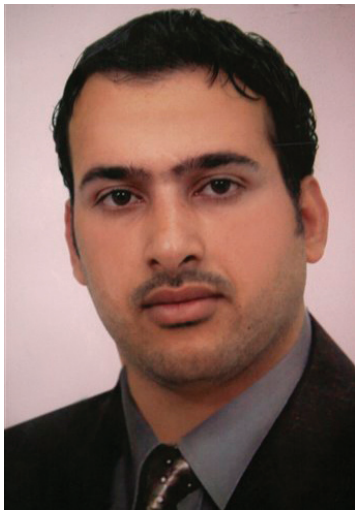


**Price of a barrel
of petroleum
today:
US\$ 47.03**

INSIDE TODAY

WORLD NEWS

SHOE THROWER



This undated file photo made available Monday, Dec. 15, 2008, by his family shows Iraqi journalist Muntadhar al-Zeidi. The attorney for the Iraqi journalist who threw shoes at then-President George W. Bush says his client has been sentenced to three years in prison for assaulting a foreign leader.

See *INTERNATIONAL NEWS*

SPORTS NEWS

LEFT BEHIND



Golfer Tiger Woods waits to tee off on the ninth tee during the first round at the CA Championship, Thursday, March 12, 2009, in Doral, Fla. Woods shot a 1-under 71 in the opening round, his first of stroke play since beating Rocco Mediate in the playoff at last summer's U.S. Open.

See *Sports Today*

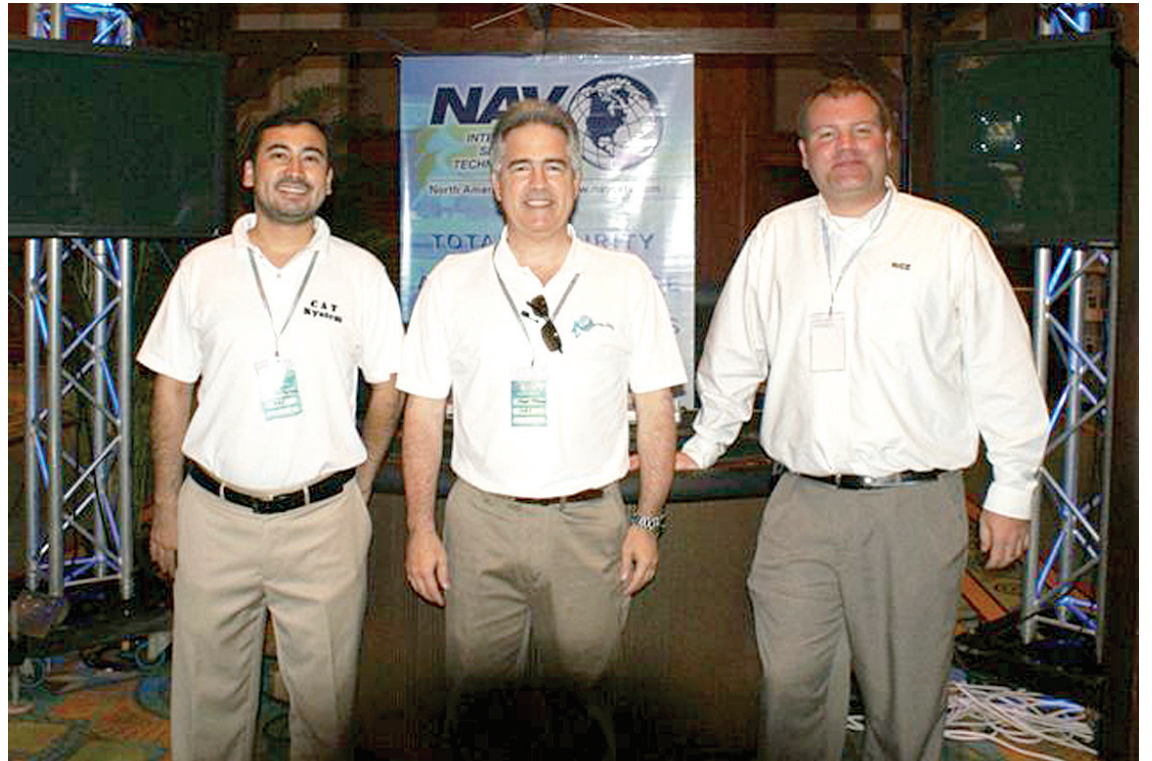
At the Renaissance Convention Center

Aruba's first gaming show is in full swing

ORANJESTAD—Aruba's first gaming show is in full swing at the Renaissance Convention Center. Show organizers CEO Elizabeth Leiva Goycochea and Excellence Group Director Patricia Alarcon report they are very pleased with the attendance in view of the fact that the gaming show comes to Aruba for the first time.

Pictured here John Jackson with Nice Systems, Paulo Mercado with CAT Systems and Oscar Atencio with NVA, North American Video introducing a state of the art total security and surveillance system to local casino executives.

Continued on Next Page



Taking air service from Amsterdam to Aruba to the next level

Martinair welcomed by Aruba Airport Authority N.V.



Martinair delegation, Joris Wels, Senior Vice President Passengers, Lars de Brabander General Manager Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, Roberto Cuesta jr, Director of Passenger Sales and Marketing The Americas and David Vincke, Account Manager Benelux, Barbara Brown Business Unit Manager Terminal, Marc Figaroa Head Commerce, Eric Croes, Danilo de Freytas, Peggy Croes Head Airline Marketing.

ORANJESTAD - Aruba Airport Authority N.V. welcomed an important Martinair delegation Wednesday afternoon headed by Joris Wels, Senior Vice President Passengers and hosted an informal lunch meeting in the VIP room. With the expansion of Martinair service to Aruba from three times a week to daily

at the end of March, Martinair will become Aruba's largest air service partner from Europe.

AAA N.V. reiterated its cooperation and commitment towards the success of the added air service. Joris Wels, Senior Vice President Passengers for Martinair feels very confident that the flights will do well. "The fact that within a time span of less than two years, we have grown from one weekly flight to daily flights to Aruba is what I consider a success". Martinair is committed to making the transition from KL to MP as smooth as possible.

"We are delighted with the additional service from Martinair to Aruba", said Peter Steinmetz, Managing Director AAA N.V. "the added capacity will give Aruba more opportunities to grow the European market". "Our team has a strong relationship with Martinair and will continue to work together in ensuring the continuation of daily service."

Martinair surprised AAA N.V. at the end of the meeting with the first copy of a new fresh promotional poster for Aruba "Aruba our Choice". Peggy Croes, Head Airline Marketing was honored to accept the framed poster from Joris Wels on behalf of AAA. □



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Aruba's first gaming show is in full swing



Continued from Front Page

Representatives of NICE, CAT & NAV offering the latest in integrated security technology were available here during the gaming show, March 12th & 13th. Douglas Florence, surveillance and gaming operations expert with over thirty years of security management experience, conducted a number of workshops during the show. He is Director for the Gaming Sector of NiceVision for NICE Systems.

Aruba boasts 11 casinos and the local officials working in the island's gaming industry benefited greatly from the opportunity to meet and mingle with global brands and international expertise. www.arubagamingshow.com



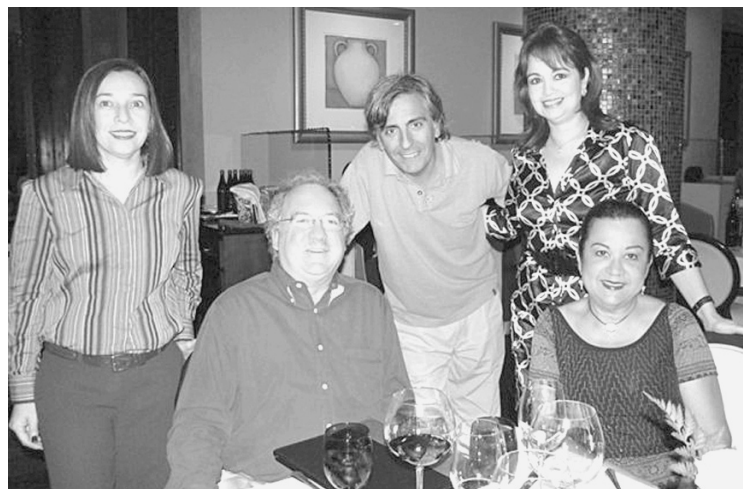
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HAPPY HOUR
 THIS FRIDAY
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 DJ YEIMY SPINNING

Sunset Grille entertains CATA dignitaries



PALM BEACH – A popular annual conference known as CATA, “CONFERENCIA ANUAL DI TURISMO DE ARUBA” attracts a great number of hospitality professionals from South America to our shores. The conference facilitates networking and business opportunities delivering business results. On Wednesday, the Radisson Aruba Resort Casino & Spa entertained its own sales representatives for dinner at the Sunset Grille Restaurant the resort’s four-diamond rated American steakhouse. Arelis Arrioja from Venezuela, Alicia Miralles from Colombia, and hospitality veteran Milton D’Onofrio from Argentina, mingled with the sales and marketing department staffers under the leadership of Director Francis Purvey, assisted by senior members of his team Lily Polsbroek, Mylene Marques, and Vicky Peres, as well as a number of reservations and accounting executives. The team assigned with the promotion of Aruba’s Grande Dame in Latin America, enjoyed quality time together, conducting an open dialogue over delicious food and wine. Pictured here synergy in the making as the Radisson Sales & Marketing team dines at Sunset Grille. □



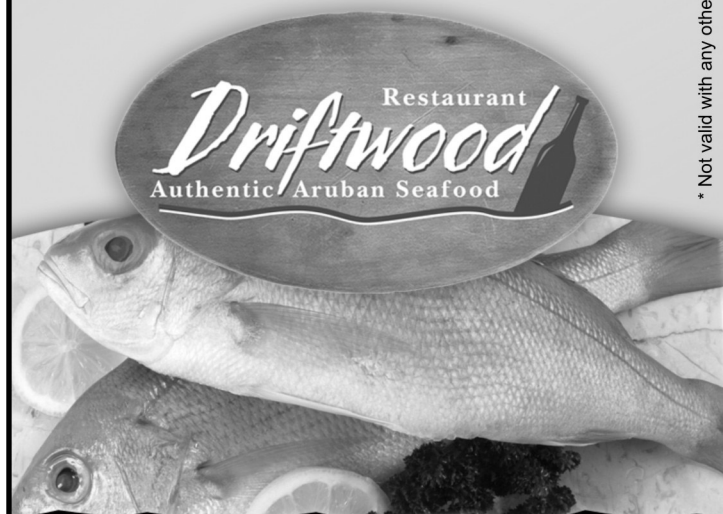
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* Not valid with any other promotion.



NOTICE:

Casino chips with old Aruba Marriott Sail Boat Logo can be cashed out at the Casino Cage until July 1, 2009.

No chip exchange is possible after July 1, 2009

The Aruba Bank Puzzle in the Rugrats (Chabelito) Magazine

Maricarmen Bikker is the Aruba Bank Winner



ORANJESTAD - Kids that participated in the puzzle of Aruba Bank in the Rugrats (Chabelito) Magazine had the chance to win an ABC Savings Account. Aruba Bank has an ABC Savings that parents can start accumulating money on, from the minute their child is born and the account offers a very high interest percentage. Parents can deposit a fixed amount monthly on the account so that when your child finishes their junior education, they have a sum of money at their disposal to continue their studies abroad or locally. Aruba Bank sponsored an educational puzzle in the

Rugrats (Chabelito) Magazine Class 3A. Aruba Bank and the Rugrats (Chabelito) Magazine would like to congratulate Maricarmen with her prize and would like to remind and encourage parents and kids alike to continue saving. □

With 'Route to Rum Shops'

Heineken revitalizes an Aruban tradition

First stop at Essoville gets great reviews

SAN NICOLAS – A fusion of different generations, ethnic backgrounds and ways of life is what those at Essoville Rum Shop witnessed last Friday afternoon. Brought together by the latest Heineken promotion, everybody enjoyed a single denomination...their good taste in beer and their craving to have a good time.

Since the beginning of the 20th century locals have found their way to these small yet colorful places to unwind, socialize and of course get the coldest beer around. Yet, with the passing of the years and the introduction of modern entertainment concepts such as café and night clubs, the rum shop struggled to survive with a small yet loyal clientele. Heineken Route To Rumshop was right on target with this initiative that intends to make the gap between Aruban generations and cultures closer. Therefore went on to prove that you only need good music, good beer and good friends to have a wonderful time anywhere.

Breaking the ice that afternoon was a crioyo quartet by the name of Sodo y Cuero. They played a repertoire that inevitably brought the patriotism and the smiles in you. And tough the rain attempted to soak the vibe, it only brought everybody closer inside the cute little rum shop in San Nicolas to chat and mingle.

Once the skies cleared, Datapanik got into overdrive and put everybody into dancing mood. Young and old share the love for good music. The first edition of the Heineken Route to Rum Shop was a total success. See you again this Friday at Caribbean Store. Don't miss it! □

Buccaneer Restaurant

Aruba's Legendary Buccaneer Restaurant, serving the freshest fish and seafood from the sea to your to your plate including steaks, duck, poultry and pasta dishes.

Whether you come with the whole family, bring a group of friends, or enjoy for a romantic dinner for two, Buccaneer has the high quality service and fresh, flavorful international dishes that will make your dining experience a memorable reservations email us at info@buccaneeraruba.com or call 586-6172

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Ahoy Matey bring this ad in for a free glass of house wine



Don't drink & DRIVE



\$19.95, All You Can Eat Dinner Buffet

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Sundown Special, receive 10% off your meal when seated by 6 p.m.

*Kids Eat Free *Kids under age 12, one per paying adult

Monday Seafood Sampler

Tuesday Bravo Italiano

Wednesday An island favorite - BBQ night

Thursday Chateaubriand, Oo-la-la

Friday International Seafood Festival

Saturday Simply Perfect - Prime Rib

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Radisson
ARUBA
RESORT, CASINO & SPA

Visitors love Matilde Restaurant

True friendships are rare to find but Alan and Doris Lehman (Delaware) together with Bonnie Austin and Pat Donovan really know the meaning of being friends as they have been coming together in Aruba for the last 25 years! They witnessed the growth of the island and just felt in love with the warmth and kindness of our people. While visiting Aruba for such a long time, they also fell in love with Matilde and have been regular customers of the restaurant for years. When asked what makes Matilde restaurant different from any other restaurant, they said that, "Matilde is different and the food is amazing!" "Nowhere else on the island can we enjoy the wines that we really like!" They will be back in Aruba in Aruba in September and for sure Matilde will be "THE PLACE" to have a delightful lunch.



Ron and Carol from Cape Cod, Massachusetts have been coming in Aruba for the past 10 years and since this time they have been regular guests of Matilde. Although they have been coming to the restaurant for so many years, yesterday was their first time having lunch at Matilde and they truly enjoyed their famous: "Club Matilde" and "Grouper Sandwich". When asked why they love Matilde so much, Mrs. Carol answered that the "food is excellent" and on her birthday, the staff at Matilde always make it always special for her. "We are coming back," they said and promised to have more lunch meals at Matilde. □



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At the Radisson Aruba Resort Casino & Spa

CATA Delegates Enjoy Successful Marketplace & Lunch



Salsa-merenque Irish Party...

Mambo Jambo to celebrate St. Patrick's Day



ORANJESTAD - This year we will be celebrating St Patrick's Day again, this time at Mambo Jambo downtown on March 17th (Tuesday), so we will be having a salsa-merenque Irish Party... that means fun.

Live bands, but also dj's on the balcony for those who just want to lounge and relax.

Since Digicel and Budweiser are the main sponsors, we will be raffling Digicel cell phones and Budweiser Beach Chairs, dinners for 2 from the wine and dine restaurants and a lot more.

At the entrance there will be promotional girls handing out St Patty's tatoos, glow bracelets, hats, gum, and lucky charm cookies with gifts, so be in time.

The beer will be green this night, and we will be having green Patty shots the whole night for everybody!

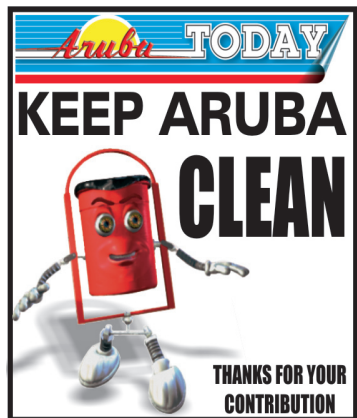
Tickets are available at Mambo Jambo for 10\$, reserve your ticket in time, tickets like these go fast!☐



PALM BEACH – The Grand Caribbean Ballroom at the Radisson Aruba Resort Casino & Spa was buzzing with activity as CATA delegates conducted marketplace meetings with their Aruban suppliers.

The event drew a record attendance of Aruba's hoteliers and activity directors as they conducted brisk business with the CONFERENCIA ANUAL DI TURISMO DE ARUBA guests hailing from Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico y Peru, a total of 70 operators representing 45 companies and 7 airline associates.

Lunch at the Sunset Grille Restaurant was sponsored by the Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association and featured a lovely spread prepared by the resort's executive chef Hector Espinoza and his culinary team. □





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A truly unique ambiance for both lunch and dinner

Café Rembrandt is the pefect place to relax with great food



Boasting fine dark wood finishes throughout, a patrons table and a fantastic outdoor terrace, café Rembrandt is sure to give you that comfortable and convivial feel. The staff is a solid team with abundant experience, and they all share the love for hospitality. Café Rembrandt has the ambiance of a bar where you can spend an afternoon reading the paper,

while at the same go there for a big night out. Three days a week there is live music, always at the right pace but never too loud. Café Rembrandt is open for lunch, boasting various Dutch delights, ranging from sandwiches to “bitterballen” (the original Dutch snack) to salads and warm dishes. At night you can sit down both inside and out for

a relaxed dinner. The focus is very much on the right balance between price and quality, ensuring you can eat and drink for local prices. You will discover that the service is quick, but never in a hurry, and most people will stay the entire night. We invite you to come and indulge in that unique atmosphere you will only find at Café Rembrandt.

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call 586 4747 or
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Beachside Dining in that ‘just right’ atmosphere

Sunset & Dinner at Matthew's tonight



Located at Casa del Mar resort in Eagle Beach, Matthew's is the brain child of Stefan Legger, who owned and operatead Rumba Bar & Grill for 6 years. Matthew's redefines the concept of a beachside restaurant, delivering an exquisite blend of fine dining and comfort food with that ‘sand on your toes’ feeling. The staff is extremely friendly and demonstrate very clearly that they are there for one thing; you.

Also being a very wanted venue for events and weddings, it very advisable to call and make a reservation, but if you want to

just give it a go, no problem. Matthew's has a great bar which will keep you abreast of all the action, whether it's sports on one of their 3 TV's, or what cocktails the bartenders can whip up for you. Besides breakfast, lunch and dinner, Matthew's offers all you can eat spareribs on Tuesdays, Champagne brunch on Sundays and of course their famous daily happy hours with live music at the bar.



Opening Hours
 Daily from 7:30am till 10:00pm
Daily Happy Hours
 Noon - 1:00pm
 4:00pm - 6:00pm (with live music)
 9:00pm - 10:00pm
 For Reservations & Information call:
 Tel: 588 7300



ARUBA

Hard Rock Cafe is “over the top” for fun, food and reviving great memories

The official opening of **Hard Rock Cafe Aruba** in January had all the glitz and glamour of any Hollywood carpet event, and the newest addition to this world famous brand of casual eateries is an entertaining journey through musical history, as well as offering a guaranteed great meal at a very reasonable price. Music is so much a part of our lives, often interwoven with the landmark moments; the first kiss, a marriage proposal, the first dance as man and wife. How many times have you heard or said, **“Honey, they are playing our song!”** Hard Rock has all those great

songs and videos in their play list, enveloping patrons in a world of music that brings back those special memories of moments that changed one's life. Founded by Isaac Tigrett and Peter Morton in 1971 and located right next door to Eric Clapton's recording studio in London, the first **Hard Rock Cafe** became an instant hit with those that loved a good “old-fashioned American hamburger” and started a legend, resulting in one of the largest and most successful leisure franchises existing today. Hard Rock's remarkable music memorabilia collection began with a red fender given

Aruba's Flavour



the founders by Eric Clapton, to mark his special table where he came to dine on a daily basis. Not to be outdone, other great names such as The Who followed his example; eventually leading to the assortment of music memorabilia that includes anything from a lock of hair to a five-ton psychedelic bus. In **Aruba** you find no buses, but a fascinating collection of instruments, posters, wild and wicked costumes and

other miscellaneous items, many of them autographed by the legendary performers they commemorate. Dozens of bits of memorabilia and high definition plasma screens create the music world ambiance that defines **Hard Rock Cafe**, as well as their diverse menu of fresh fajitas, authentic western barbecue, and of course, their famous certified Angus beef burgers, huge and juicy, the way a burger was meant to be.

Seafood as you've not had before

The freshest seafood is at Moby Dick's

PASEO HERENCIA – inside is studded with Moby Dick's has one artwork, amazing glass mission; to take you to the depths of the blue ocean to taste some of the most exquisite dishes to come from the deep. What a truly beautiful restaurant this is, and what a unique interior to match. The



runs along the complete wall. The menu promises to be a true seafood lovers dream. Lobsters, fresh fish fillets, shrimps, Moby Dick's has everything on the menu. There is of course a land lubbers section for those who are so disposed. The wine list is impressive to say the least, and the cocktails are definitely worth a taste. Moby Dick's is open for lunch as well. The chef has made a well rounded, extensive menu for you to choose from. You will find what you want, whatever your craving may be at that time. The staff is amongst the friendliest on the island, ever so attentive to your every whim. So long story short, for unbelievable seafood in unique surroundings, go to Moby Dick's. You'll have a whale of a time!



This is the only place on the island to savor the legendary Bloody Oyster - the ultimate delicacy only known by deep sea connoisseurs who take pleasure in its delight on Sunday mornings. No need to wait for Sunday for this deep sea concoction of Fresh Oysters, Cooked Shrimp, Cold Vodka, Tomato Juice, Tabasco, Lime Juice, Black Pepper and Celery.



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Darrin and Tiffany exchange vows at Sunset



Bella Aruba Photography by Angela



Bella Aruba Photography by Angela



Bella Aruba Photography by Angela

MooMba- On March 10, 2009, Darrin Kert and Tiffany Ulrich of Akron, Ohio vowed their love at sunset. The lovebirds met in the winter 2 years ago through a scheduled cycling training. They have a lot in common and competitive bike racing is their favorite. Darrin knew that he found the love of his life and knew it was time to settle down and have a family. Last Christmas while

in Hawaii on vacation lying on a hammock Darrin surprised Tiffany and proposed his love. During their engagement another surprise was created, their daughter Quinn, now 8 months old. The ceremony took place at Palm Beach with loved ones. After the wedding the newlyweds and guests enjoyed a breathtaking photo shoot with Bella Aruba Photography



Bella Aruba Photography by Angela

with the gorgeous sunset disappearing behind the horizon. Everyone toasted with champagne and enjoyed the ambiance at MooMba bar & restaurant while they

sipped on cocktails. Darrin and Tiffany own a piece of paradise at the Marriott Surf Club and love returning to Aruba.

"We want to thank Lissy Lampe of Ceremonies & Celebrations for going above & beyond at making our special day on to remember," replied Tiffany. The newlyweds and guests dined that evening at the 2009 award winning four diamond Radisson Resort's Sunset Grill restaurant for a romantic evening with fine cuisine.

The following day the newlyweds went deep sea fishing on the Caroline fishing charter and what a great experience. At the same time they caught 2 Mahi Mahi and a Barracuda. They enjoyed a fantastic meal at the Buccaneer with their fresh fish that was grilled to perfection.

Aruba Today wishes you a life of happiness with your precious daughter Quinn. □

Photos by Angela Munzenhofer



Bella Aruba Photography by Angela



Bella Aruba Photography by Angela



Bella Aruba Photography by Angela

The Westin Resort host Luncheon for travel professionals

Aruba hosts CATA delegates



PALM BEACH –This week, the Aruba Tourism Authority has been overseeing the Annual Tourism Conference of Aruba. Travel professionals, including travel agents, tour operators, and press from South American and Central American countries like Costa Rica, Colombia, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, and Brazil are here on the island to sample,

first-hand, the pleasures of our accommodations, dining, activities, and entertainment. Throughout the week, various Aruba tourism partners hosted events for the delegates, and on Tuesday afternoon, a luncheon was hosted by the Westin Resort, Aruba for the travel professionals and other partners participating in the conference. The luncheon was held at the resort's flagship restaurant, Pago Pago. Westin executives were on-hand to also give the travel professionals a tour of the newly renovated property. □



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- Seafood tempera (pickled seafood)

Warm Tapas

- Shrimps in spicy Amazing sauce
- Escargot in creamy -Pernod sauce
- Beef tenderloin kebabs with pepper and herbs

and much more tapas for you to enjoy!

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Bijleveld consents to evaluate Kingdom's guarantee function

THE HAGUE--Dutch State Secretary of Kingdom Relations Ank Bijleveld-Schouten on Tuesday agreed to make an evaluation of the guarantee function of the Kingdom as stated in article 43 of the Charter. She will do this at the request of the Second Chamber.

During a meeting with Parliament's Permanent Committee of Antillean and Aruban Affairs NAAZ in The Hague Tuesday, Bijleveld-Schouten said she considered this a good idea, in light of the constitutional reform in the Dutch Kingdom.

Member of Parliament (MP) Ronald van Raak of the Socialist Party (SP) first brought up the idea of an analysis of the guarantee function. He asked the State Secretary to prepare a document in which she would elaborate on the guarantee function and her vision for the future on this task of the Kingdom Government.

He said there were several cases of "structural failure," such as good governance, and the Isla refinery and Bon Futuro prison - both located

on Curaçao. Article 43 gives the Kingdom Government the authority to intervene in cases of structural failure.

MP Jan Schinkelshoek of the Christian Democratic Party CDA agreed that the issue of the guarantee function needed a thorough reflection. "Where does our responsibility start and where does it end? What exactly is this guarantee function? What is the basis and what exactly do we expect of each other?" he asked.

Schinkelshoek said this issue led to agitation on both sides of the ocean, and the concerns expressed by the Second Chamber were mostly well-intended.

MP Johan Remkes of the liberal democratic VVD party shared his colleagues' opinion that a broad analysis of the guarantee function was a good plan. He said on a regular basis, there were discussions on this function and the use of it.

"We need clarity, because the Second Chamber is doing the splits on this issue," he said. Remkes said the Netherlands should learn the art of letting go, also financially letting

go. He said analysing the guarantee function was also important in light of future changes to the Charter.

Bijleveld-Schouten said the analysis would be broad-based and include three aspects, namely the Charter, a long-term vision on the Kingdom, and the constitutional change. She said she had already been considering drawing up an assessment of the relations in the Kingdom and the way the partners in this Constellation should deal with each other.

MP Ineke van Gent of the green left party GroenLinks made clear that the review of the guarantee function should not put this authority on hold while this issue was being looked at. Van Gent asked Bijleveld-Schouten last week to make use of article 43 to intervene in the Isla refinery and Bon Futuro prison in Curaçao because, in her opinion, authorities in Curaçao were structurally failing to solve the problems.

Bijleveld-Schouten assured Van Gent that this certainly would not be the case. She referred to the fact the Kingdom Council of Ministers

in December to use article 43 when Aruba refused to vote in favour of the Kingdom law to regulate the Common Court of Justice in the new constitutional relations.

By invoking article 43,

Aruba's endorsement was no longer necessary to approve this piece of draft legislation. The Kingdom Government also used this article in the 1990s to place St. Maarten under higher supervision.

Richard Gibson says

Spots and websites to lure referendum voters

WILLEMSTAD--The campaign for the referendum on the constitutional future of Curaçao this May 15 is heating up. The opponents of the current trajectory have united into the organisation "Vota Nò" (Vote No) and have launched their own website: www.vota-no.com. Also the "Yes" camp has, in the meantime, created a website: www.kuradigital.com.

On the website "Vota Nò" is up-to-date information as to "why the population must vote 'No' on the day of the referendum." There are several documents and news-articles, and short videos in which the current constitutional process was dealt with.

Kuradigital.com shows the time left (in days, hours, minutes and seconds) for the referendum to take place. There were also a lot of videos with former PAR prime minister Etienne Ys participating in several talk shows.

The site also shows readers' opinions and other documents about the referendum.

MAN party leader Charles Cooper did not want to say much about the activities of "Vota Nò," but did indicate there were several spots on local radio and TV. He said there was going to be a grand manifestation with cultural and social activities, as well as an exchange of information in Hôfi Biesheuvel this Saturday.

During a meeting in Because Entertainment Centre last Saturday, coalition partners PAR, FOL and PNP, advocated a "Yes" in the referendum, and officially joined hands for a joint campaign. They agreed that the parties will run the campaign for a "Yes" separately, but mutually.

The campaign team formed especially for this consisted of Gimena van der Gen (PNP), Glenn Sulvaran (PAR), and Harry Krafft Walters (FOL). According to the three parties, their campaign was going to focus on the "truths of a yes" in the referendum, based on valid arguments, and contradict the "empty arguments of the opponents."

Cooper was very pleased with the campaign that the "No" voters have run until now. He said the parties MAN, NPA and FK were behind 'Vota Nò', but "everybody that is for no."

The organisation, for which a foundation was being established, was willing to work together with other organisations which were also advocating a "No," Cooper said.


He said there was a good relationship with PS leader Helmin Wiels, with whom MAN together with NPA, had been in the Aliansa Patriótico (AP) for some time. However, this cooperation failed after the other three parties blamed PS for not having stuck to the agreements.

"But there are more roads that lead to Rome and we are willing to work with everybody that wants to reach Rome. It doesn't matter how you get there, as long as you get to Rome. That's what we want."

"We had a lot of deliberations lately with, among others, lawyer Eldon 'Pèpi' Sulvaran, to figure out how we can assist each other in this coming period. We don't want to get in each other's way," Cooper said.

The package the Island Territory, Central Government, and other Kingdom partners have negotiated was mentioned during the meeting of the coalition partners last Saturday. According to a press release of the advocates of the current process, this meeting must be considered as a prelude of the "Yes" campaign that has now started in earnest.

According to these parties, a mutual campaign had lots of advantages and the campaign can be run more efficiently and more effectively, while a stronger block can be formed to run a political information campaign. □




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BUSINESS

Aruba TODAY

GM says can survive March without new U.S. aid

DETROIT (Reuters) – General Motors Corp (GM.N) has told U.S. officials that it can survive without \$2 billion in additional aid that it had requested to get through March, the automaker said on Thursday.

GM said in a statement that it had been able to defer the first tranche of its aid request after stepping up the pace of planned cost-cutting and holding back on some spending that had been planned for January and February.

However, it remains unclear whether the development will result in a scaled-back overall request for assistance on top of the \$13.4 billion bailout approved in December.

“A lot depends on how the market and the economy goes. We’ve run a little ahead on some of the cost reduction stuff, which is good, but at this point the market is still tough,” GM Chief Executive Rick Wagoner said on the sidelines of a business conference in Washington. “We haven’t updated it.”

An Obama administration task force headed by Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and White House economic adviser Larry Summers is considering GM’s request for more than \$16 billion in additional help and a separate request for up to \$5 billion from Chrysler.

Chrysler received \$4 billion in the same bailout package that was extended to GM last year. The task force has until the end of March for its deliberations as GM works to secure new concessions from its bondholders and the United Auto Workers union to cut

its debt by a combined \$28 billion.

Shares of GM jumped after the announcement and closed up 17 percent to \$2.18 in New York trade.

Despite GM’s decision on Thursday, the White House is still taking a deliberate approach for dealing with the distressed auto industry.

“In terms of what GM has announced today, I don’t know whether that makes the current job that much easier,” said White House spokesman Robert Gibbs of task force decision-making.

“We still, as the president has said, have to come up with a long-term solution that retools and re-imagines the auto industry so it is sustainable. That’s the goal of the task force and I think they are working toward that quickly.”

Gibbs said Obama has been briefed on progress of the task force.

The White House also said the task force is focusing on struggling suppliers, who serve U.S. and overseas manufacturers and have also sought billions in government assistance to stay in business.

Wagoner also expressed concerns about that sector on Thursday.

“I think the state of the supply base is difficult. We’re watching it closely and we’re trying to work with them and we need to do that,” Wagoner said.

On Wednesday, the top U.S. executive of Toyota Motor Corp (7203.T) told reporters that the company is concerned with the health of about 100 suppliers but is worried about

20 to 30 within that group. Jim Lentz said Toyota is working on contingencies to offset any possible supply disruption.

GM burned through \$5 billion in the fourth quarter and ended the year reliant on the first \$4 billion in loans it received from the Treasury.

Under the restructuring plan submitted to the government in mid-February, GM had forecast that it would burn through another \$5.1 billion in January

and February.

It was not immediately clear how the cost-cutting efforts GM made in the first months of the quarter had affected its projected cash burn rate.

One area of cost concern for GM and other domestic automakers is healthcare, which was discussed at a White House forum held in Dearborn, Michigan, on Thursday.

“GM is one of the largest private payers in healthcare

in the country covering a million individuals and we have struggled with our health care costs,” Shelly Hoffmann, Director of Health Care Plans at GM said.

“Cars produced in Canada cost \$1,000 less than cars produced in the United States simply because of healthcare costs. We’ve got to turn that around,” said Melody Barnes, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council. □



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Stocks rally on good news for banks, GM, retailers



By MADLEN READ,
AP Business Writer
NEW YORK – Investors have been clamoring for months for a bit of good news. On Thursday, they got a load of

Timothy A. Curley and other traders signal in the S&P 500 futures pit near the close of trading at the CME Group Tuesday, March 10, 2009, in Chicago. Wall Street has had its best day of the year after Citigroup Inc. said it operated at a profit during the first two months of the year. The Dow Jones industrials shot up nearly 380 points.

(AP Photo/M. Spencer Green)

it. The Dow Jones industrials shot up 240 points to a two-week high of 7,170, bringing its gains over the past three days to 622 points, or 9.5 percent. It was the index's biggest three-day jump since last November. Surprisingly positive signals this week from companies across all industries, particularly banks, have made traders think twice about continuing to drive stocks lower. It's too soon to tell whether this week's upturn is the beginning of a bull market or simply a temporary rally within a bear market, but either way there has been a pronounced change in Wall Street's tone.

"How all this turned around in a week, I don't know," said Scott Bleier, president of CreateCapital Advisors. "But it's certainly a better outlook than how it looked two weeks ago."

The rally got an extra dose of adrenaline Thursday after an accounting board told Congress it may recommend an easing in financial reporting rules of tough-to-sell assets — a change that banks say would help their bottom lines. Upheaval in the banking industry has been dogging the market since 2007, and hope that banks might finally get relief in how they value their bad assets spurred a flurry of buying on Wall Street.

"We might find that the banks are not as bad, or not bad at all, if these assets are marked

differently," said Doreen Mogavero, president of the New York floor brokerage Mogavero, Lee & Co.

Better-than-expected retail sales figures also helped stocks, as did positive news from four Dow companies: Bank of America Corp., General Electric Co., General Motors Corp., and Pfizer Inc. GE's credit rating was cut by less than expected, GM said it will not need a \$2 billion loan it previously requested from the government, and Pfizer reported a successful cancer drug trial. Bank of America's CEO told reporters his bank was profitable in January and February. Citigroup Inc. triggered this week's rally Tuesday with similar remarks.

No one is calling the end to the selling on Wall Street. The economic picture is too uncertain, and much of this week's rally has been driven by technical factors. One of those factors is traders' inclination to buy stock to cover "short" bets, or bets that a stock will fall. But it's been the most reassuring week in months for the stock market. The Dow Jones Wilshire 5000 index, which reflects nearly all stocks traded in America, has jumped 11.2 percent over the past three sessions. That's a paper gain of \$900 billion.

"There's a lot of money on the sidelines, and a lot of people who've been waiting for the turn to come," Mogavero said.

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Joaquin Phoenix leaps into crowd at hip-hop show

By LISA ORKIN

EMMANUEL,

Associated Press Writer

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. — Joaquin Phoenix appears to be getting into the act of being a petulant hip-hop star.

He jumped off the stage during a short performance at the LIV nightclub early Thursday morning and confronted an audience member who was heckling him. Security guards dragged him back on stage and escorted him away.

It's unknown whether the confrontation — and his pledge to quit acting and start rapping — was real or a put-on, but actor Casey Affleck recorded the performance on camera.

In October, Phoenix's publicist confirmed he was making the career switch. In January he performed at a Las Vegas nightclub and the next month he made a strange appearance on David Letterman's "Late Show." Actor Ben Stiller lampooned that appearance at

the Oscars.

Hundreds of people packed the nightclub at the Fontainebleau Miami Beach hotel after the doors opened at 10:30 p.m. Wednesday night.

Several of those in the audience said they came just to see Phoenix, who left them cooling their heels for almost four hours while disc jockeys played house and hip-hop music.

Phoenix came out on stage before 2 a.m., smoking a cigarette and wearing a disheveled dark suit, sneakers and his scraggly long hair and beard.

He began rapping to a beat played by the DJ and nodding to the music, although most of the lyrics were unintelligible. Then he responded to someone who appeared to be heckling him in the audience near the stage.

"We have a (double-expletive) in the audience," he said before jumping into the crowd. It was not immediately clear whether

the two men exchanged any blows.

"I saw the guy screaming at Joaquin, and Joaquin just came down," said Jorge Lledo, 30, of Miami Beach.

Security guards swarmed the scene and dragged Phoenix away.

The bizarre spectacle struck many in the audience as the latest prank in an extended farce staged by Phoenix. Affleck, an Oscar-nominated actor who is also Phoenix's brother-in-law, is making a documentary about Phoenix's career shift. □

Joaquin Phoenix performs at the LIV nightclub at the Fountainbleau Hotel in Miami Beach, Fla., early Thursday, March 12, 2009 for a Belvedere 1X Party. Phoenix jumped off the stage during the short performance and confronted an audience member who was heckling him. Security guards dragged him back on stage and escorted Phoenix away.

(AP Photo/Seth Brownnik)



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and Hans Heijink together with the staff Romalo, Heidi, Mariella, Denise and Chef Gerben work hard keeping the restaurant **open 7 days a week from 4 pm till 11pm** for everyone to enjoy. The ambiance at the restaurant is out of this world, whether dinning inside in the relaxed air-conditioned dinning room or outside on the terrace to enjoy the tropical breeze and daily live music. Most guests come in early for the **daily fresh catches**, such as Red snapper, grouper, mahi mahi, wahoo and tuna. Check with the server to find out about the Catch of the day. The chef will be more than happy to prepare your fish the way you like it best: grilled, deep-fried,



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'Deeply sorry and ashamed' Bernard Madoff pleads guilty

By TOM HAYS and LARRY NEUMEISTER

Associated Press Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Careful to blame only himself, a “deeply sorry and ashamed” Bernard Madoff pleaded guilty Thursday to pulling off what could be the biggest, most spectacular swindle Wall Street has even seen, and was sent off to jail in handcuffs to the applause of his furious victims.

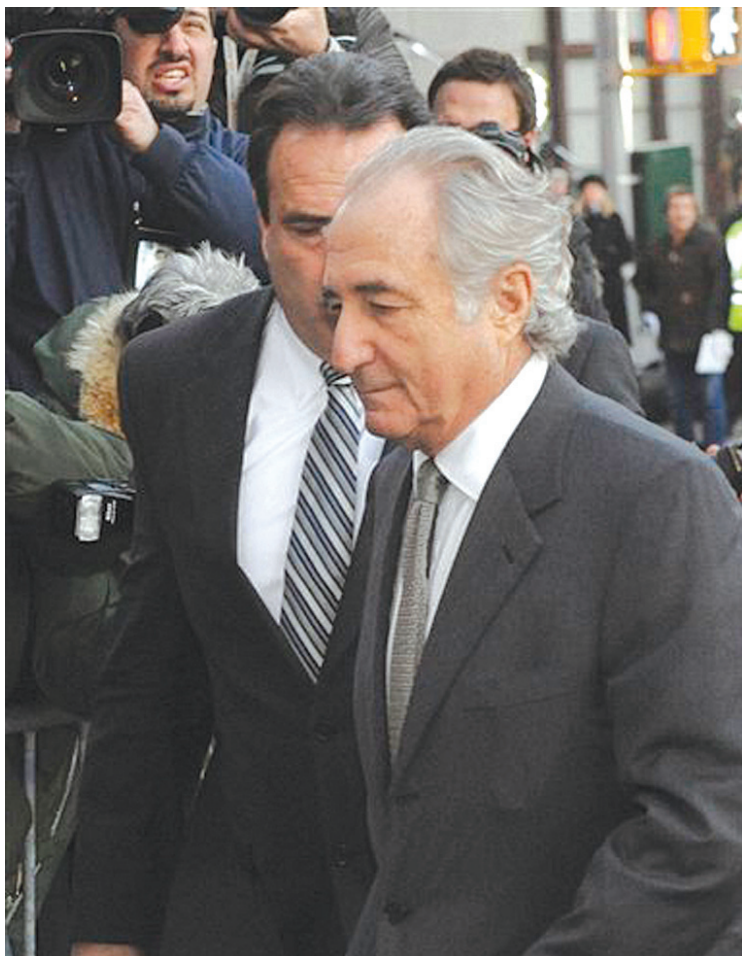
“I realized that my arrest and this day would inevitably come,” Madoff said in a courtroom crammed with many of the investors he cheated out of billions of dollars.

The 70-year-old financier could get up to 150 years in prison at sentencing June 16 on 11 counts, including securities fraud and perjury. He could also be fined and ordered to pay restitution to his victims and forfeit any ill-gotten gains.

In a long, detailed statement delivered in a soft but steady voice, Madoff implicated no one but himself in the vast Ponzi scheme. He said he started it as a short-term way to weather the early-1990s recession, and was unable to extricate himself as the years went by.

“I am actually grateful for this opportunity to publicly comment about my crimes, for which I am deeply sorry and ashamed,” Madoff said in his first public comments about his crimes since the \$65 billion scandal broke in early December.

The scandal turned a well-respected investment professional — Madoff was once chairman of the Nasdaq exchange — into a symbol of Wall Street greed amid the economic meltdown. The public fury toward him was so great that he was known



Bernard Madoff arrives at Manhattan federal court, Thursday, March 12, 2009, in New York.

Associated Press

to wear a bulletproof vest to court.

U.S. District Judge Denny Chin promptly revoked the \$10 million bail that had allowed Madoff to remain free since he confessed to his sons three months ago. In ordering him jailed, the judge said Madoff had the means to flee and an incentive to do so because of his age. The court appearance came as a disappointment to many of Madoff's investors, who hoped to hear him say who might have helped him pull off the scam, and where the money went.

Because Madoff pleaded guilty as charged, without any kind of deal with prosecutors, he is under no obligation to cooperate with them. As a result, some legal experts and others have speculated that he is sacrificing himself to protect his wife, his family

and friends.

“He’s trying to save the rest of his family,” said investor Judith Welling. “We need to find out who else was involved, and we need, obviously, to freeze the assets of all those people involved to help the victims.” There was a smattering of applause after the judge announced Madoff would go directly to jail — the drab, windowless high-rise Metropolitan Correctional Center next door to the courthouse to await sentencing. But that did not lessen his victims’ anger or satisfy their desire for retribution.

“So he spends the rest of his life in jail — is that justice? People’s lives are ruined,” said Adriane Biondo of Los Angeles, one of five members of her family who lost money with Madoff.

Continued on Next Page



A survivor is removed from a Cougar Helicopter on the helicopter tarmac at the Health Sciences Center in St. John's, New Foundland, Canada, on Thursday March 12, 2008.

Associated Press

Helicopter with 18 aboard ditches in Atlantic Ocean

ST. JOHN'S, Newfoundland (AP) — Rescuers searched freezing waters for 16 missing people Thursday after a helicopter reported mechanical problems and ditched into the Atlantic Ocean off Newfoundland, officials said.

Of the 18 aboard, one person was rescued and one body has been recovered. The others were missing about 30 miles out to sea, officials at a news conference said.

Continued from Page B5

Iraqi who threw shoes at Bush jailed for three years



In this Dec. 14, 2008 file photo, Iraqi journalist Muntadhar al-Zeidi throws a shoe at President George W. Bush during a new conference with Iraq Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Baghdad, Iraq.

Associated Press

By HAMZA HENDAWI

Associated Press Writer

BAGHDAD (AP) — A court convicted an Iraqi journalist of assault Thursday for hurling his shoes at George W. Bush and sentenced him to three years in prison, prompting an angry outburst from his family and calls for his release from Iraqis who consider him an icon for a nation decimated by war. Muntadhar al-Zeidi, 30, defiantly shouted “long live Iraq” as the sentence was imposed, according to defense lawyers.

Continued on Page B6



In this artist's sketch, Bernard Madoff, right, speaks to the court during a hearing in federal court Thursday, March 12, 2009 in New York.

Associated Press

MADOFF

Continued from Page B1

"He's sitting in jail? That's awesome," she said sarcastically. "Where's the money, Bernie?"

DeWitt Baker, an investor who attended the hearing and said he lost more than \$1 million with Madoff, said: "I'd stone him to death."

Prosecutors gave assurances they are investigating Madoff's wife and other family members and employees to determine what role, if any, they played in scam.

"A lot of resources and effort are being expended, both to find assets and to find anyone else who may be responsible for this fraud," federal prosecutor Marc Litt said.

In court documents, prosecutors put the amount of the fraud at \$64.8 billion. However, experts said that the actual loss was probably much less and that the higher number reflects the false profits Madoff told investors they were making. So far, authorities have located only about \$1 billion for investors.

Prosecutors have already said low-level employees in Madoff's New York offices participated by mailing out tens of thousands of phony monthly statements and trading confirmations to make it look as if customers were making money in the market. Some investors suspect their money ended up in the hands of Madoff's wife, Ruth. She was not in court Thursday. But the mere mention of her name drew jeers and laughter.

In one instance, defense lawyer Ira Sorkin was describing how Madoff had, "at his wife's own expense," paid for security at his \$7 million penthouse in Manhattan. Loud laughter erupted among some of the more than 100 spectators crammed into the courtroom on the 24th floor of the federal courthouse in lower Manhattan. There was more snickering when Sorkin mentioned Mrs. Madoff's "small residence in France." His thousands of victims included individuals, trusts, pension funds, hedge funds and nonprofit organizations. The scheme wiped out people's

fortunes, ruined charities and foundations, and apparently pushed at least two investors to commit suicide.

Investors big and small were swindled, from Florida retirees to celebrities such as Steven Spielberg, actor Kevin Bacon and Hall of Fame pitcher Sandy Koufax. Many of Madoff's victims were Jews and Jewish charities, which trusted him because he is Jewish. Those cheated included Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel.

In court Thursday, Madoff — a stocky figure, clad in a charcoal-gray suit, with swept-back, wavy gray hair — said he began the scheme during the last recession, when "I felt compelled to satisfy my clients' expectations, at any cost." He did not put his investors' money into the market, as he claimed. Instead, it was a Ponzi scheme, or a pyramid, in which early investors are paid off with money taken in from later ones. "When I began the Ponzi scheme I believed it would end shortly and I would be able to extricate myself and my clients from the

scheme," he said. "However, this proved difficult, and ultimately impossible, and as the years went by I realized that my arrest and this day would inevitably come."

In Washington, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said: "The president is glad that swift justice will happen."

Gibbs said the Obama administration will do everything possible to ensure strict enforcement of securities regulations "and hope that through those actions that that kind of greed and irresponsibility and that kind of criminal activity never happens again."

Before the court hearing, helicopters circled above the courthouse, and federal officers with automatic weapons stood outside. Investors signed in before entering the courtroom.

"I wanted him to see some of the faces of the people he lied to and destroyed," said Cynthia Friedman, 59, of Jericho, New York. She and her husband, Richard, said Madoff defrauded them of their life savings of \$3 million.

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4-day school week gains momentum amid recession

By **CHRISTINE ARMARIO**
Associated Press Writer
TAMPA, Florida (AP) — With U.S. school districts strapped for cash, more are considering a schedule that delights students and makes working parents cringe: Class only four days a week.

By extending school hours and eliminating a day of classes each week, education officials say they could save busloads of money on transportation and utilities.

Introduced by New Mexico during the 1970s oil crisis, the abbreviated school week is gaining fresh momentum in states and districts hurt by the economic downturn. Select districts in about 17 states already follow a four-day week and legislators in Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Maine, Missouri and Washington have introduced similar proposals.

"It's happening primarily because of the economic situation," said Gale Gaines, vice president for state services at the Southern Regional Education Board. "Schools and districts are trying to work as efficiently as possible."

While there's still debate about how much districts will save, proponents say the shortened week can improve attendance and teacher retention. As for academics, studies have shown the four-day schedule does not hinder student achievement, and may even help improve test scores.

Some districts have even reported fewer disciplinary referrals and more

classroom participation.

"It's hard to get to the why, of course, because so many things affect student achievement," said Andrea D. Beesley of Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning in Denver.

State laws govern how many days students must attend class each year. In places where four-day weeks are allowed, districts are required to hold an equivalent number of instructional hours. That typically means adding just over an hour of class each day.

Critics worry, however, about burdening working parents with extra child care costs, and question whether students — especially younger ones in elementary school — can handle a longer school day without getting tired.

Since the early 1970s, the four-day school week has primarily been adopted by small, rural districts



Customers take care of business before closing time at the Utah Department of Motor Vehicles office on Thursday, Feb. 19, 2009, in Draper, Utah. Six months after Utah became the first state in the country to close most state offices on Fridays in an effort to cut energy costs, the early results are in. The state is falling short of its \$3 million energy savings goal, but has reduced the amount of overtime it pays and is saving more than \$200,000 in custodial contracts since switching to a schedule where employees work 10 hours a day, four days a week.

Associated Press

that shuttle students long distances.

The idea has especially taken hold in the Mountain states; in Colorado alone, about 60 districts are on a four-day school week this year. A 2006 Colorado Department of Education report on the four-day week said the initial reason

for making the switch has generally been financial.

These days, rural districts aren't the only one considering the switch.

In South Florida, the Broward County school district, just north of Miami, is considering the four-day week for its high schools. Officials in districts that

have four-day school weeks caution that it falls short of being a magic bullet for school budgets. For example, even though a school may be without students, utilities must be kept on because it's still a gathering place for the community and athletic competitions. □

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Texas rejects stimulus money for unemployed



In a Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2009 file photo, Republican Texas Gov. Rick Perry, center, speaks while Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, left, and House Speaker Joe Straus, R-San Antonio, right, listen during a news conference in Austin, Texas. Even as their states face crushing budget deficits and soaring unemployment, the Republican governors of Louisiana, South Carolina, Mississippi and Texas are considering turning down some of the stimulus package money.

Associated Press

By **MONICA RHOR**
Associated Press Writer

HOUSTON — Texas Gov. Rick Perry announced Thursday he turned down \$555 million of federal stimulus funding that would expand the state's unemployment benefits, saying the money would have required the state to keep paying for the expanded benefits after the stimulus money ran out.

Perry, an outspoken critic of President Barack Obama's \$787 billion stimulus bill, did accept most of the roughly \$17 billion slated for Texas in the plan. But he turned down the unemployment benefits because he said it would require the state to increase

the tax burden on Texas businesses.

"During these tough times, Texas employers are working harder than ever to move products to market, make payroll and create jobs," Perry said at a news conference. "The last thing they need is government burdening them with higher taxes and expanded obligations."

Other Republican governors have said they will turn down federal stimulus money, including Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, who said he would not accept nearly \$100 million to expand unemployment benefits.

Moments after Perry said he would reject the money, the

House Senate Committee on Federal Economic Stabilization Funding voted 5-1 in favor of a motion encouraging the Legislature to make the necessary changes to enable the state to receive \$555 million. Republican Rep. Jim Pitts, chairman of the powerful House Appropriations Committee, was among those voting in favor the motion. Perry's announcement was immediately criticized by Democratic lawmakers and advocates for low-income residents.

"Without this federal money, Texas businesses face increased unemployment insurance taxes in bad times, and without the modest reforms in state law required to get the federal money, about 45,000 Texas workers will go without unemployment insurance," said Don Baylor, a policy analyst for the Center for Public Policy Priorities.

Sen. Kirk Watson, D-Austin,

said rejecting the money "demonstrates the height of denial about the challenges confronting this state and its people."

Watson said it's now up to the Legislature, which can still try to accept the funds but risks a gubernatorial veto.

"I would not jump to the conclusion that we're not going to get the money," Baylor said. "The governor's decision puts a red light in front of the Legislature, but the Legislature still plans to go forward and hold hearings on these bills and try and get votes."

To receive the full amount of stimulus money available, lawmakers would need to adjust the time period used to determine whether people are eligible for benefits, using the four most recent quarters to determine how much a person gets instead of the current method that goes back 18 months.

Texas would also have to expand eligibility to include thousands of low-wage workers. Lawmakers have said the change would help part-time employees like single mothers, college students and senior citizens.

Perry said the requirements attached to the federal stimulus money would require a change in the state's definition of unemployment by expanding it to include part-time employees. He said such an expansion would counteract the package's objective of job creation by leading companies to limit hiring and raise prices. The governor's decision comes despite warnings from Texas Workforce Commission Chairman Tom Pauken that the state's unemployment compensation trust fund could be operating at a deficit by October. Pauken told lawmakers recently that insolvency might not be not far behind. □

Source: attorney withdraws from No.2 Treasury job

By **MARTIN CRUTSINGER**
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A prominent New York attorney has withdrawn from consideration for the No. 2 job at the Treasury Department, the second person to drop out of the running for the post, a Democratic source said

Thursday.

The Democratic source, who spoke on condition of anonymity because it involved personnel matters, said that H. Rodgin Cohen had asked to have his name removed from consideration for the job of deputy Treasury secretary.

The Obama administration

has had trouble filling posts at the Treasury Department, leaving Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner as the only official whose nomination has cleared the Senate confirmation process as the administration grapples with the worst economic crisis in seven decades.

Cohen, a partner with the New York law firm of Sullivan & Cromwell LLP, had been considered a leading candidate for the post as Geithner's deputy. The withdrawal was first reported by ABC News, which quoted sources as saying Cohen decided to take his name out of the running after an issue arose in the vetting process.

Cohen did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Last week, sources said that Annette Nazareth, a former commissioner at the Securities and Exchange Commission, had withdrawn from consideration for the same job. □



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HELICOPTER

Continued from Page B1

Rescuers pulled one person from the water with another helicopter, while the remaining 16 were still missing, officials said.

The rescued man was flown to the Health Sciences Centre in St. John's. Robert Decker of St. John's was listed in critical but stable condition.

Jeri Grychowski of the Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Halifax said a body was recovered at the same time.

Two life-rafts were spotted in the water, but rescuers later confirmed they were empty.

"The two life-rafts have been checked and there is nobody in them," said Grychowski. "They're still searching because they would have had their survival suits on."

The water temperature was zero Celsius. Major Denis McGuire of the rescue coordination center said the survival time if they were wearing a survival suit would be about 24 hours.

The suits act like life vests and stay warm in temperatures around -22 Fahrenheit. Everyone aboard the helicopter would have been required to wear such a suit, which are equipped with water-activated locator beacons. McGuire confirmed that searchers had picked up signals from the survival suits, but there was no sign of the people still missing.

"Intensive search operations continue to be under way for the other passengers," Prime Minister Stephen Harper said

in Parliament. "Our thoughts and prayers are with the families who are anxiously awaiting word on their loved ones."

The crash comes less than a month after a helicopter ferrying oil workers crashed into the North Sea. All 18 aboard were rescued from the chilly waters after the aircraft landed upright a few hundred yards from the platform and was kept afloat by inflatable bags designed to deploy when the craft lands on water.

The Super Puma helicopter involved in last month's crash landed upright in the water, deploying flotation devices that opened like car air bags when the helicopter hit. The devices, installed over the last 15 years, gave the crew time to escape onto life rafts.

The S-92 Sikorsky helicopter that crashed in Canada went down 55 miles southeast of St. John's, the provincial capital. It wasn't immediately clear if it had the same type of inflatable bags that the helicopter in the North Sea had. "Mechanical problems were reported, but we don't know the nature," Transportation Safety Board of Canada spokeswoman Julie Leroux said. □

Chicago's Sears Tower to get new tenant, new name

By CARYN ROUSSEAU

Associated Press Writer

CHICAGO (AP)—The tallest building in America is getting a new name.

Chicago's Sears Tower will be renamed Willis Tower after London-based Willis Group Holdings. The insurance broker announced the name change and other details of its agreement with the building's owners Thursday.

It's all part of a deal with London-based Willis Group Holdings. Along with moving 500 employees into 140,000 square feet on multiple floors of the 110-story building this summer, the Willis Group gets the naming rights as part of its lease agreement with the real estate investment group that owns Sears Tower.

The name change isn't the first in recent years for Chicago. In 2006, the city's State Street shopping district saw Marshall Field's department store become Macy's and in 2003 the White Sox stopped playing baseball at U.S. Cellular Field

instead of Comiskey Park.

"We certainly appreciate and understand the sentimental attraction to the Sears Tower name, and it's certainly a Chicago icon," said Will Thoretz, a spokesman in New York for Willis Holdings Group. "Our move into Chicago is a good thing for the city. We're bringing hundreds of jobs into the city."

The company is not paying extra for naming rights to the tower, Thoretz said.

"We asked for the naming rights," Thoretz said. "There was no additional cost to us."

The insurance broker will occupy more than 140,000 square feet at \$14.50 a square foot. Willis is moving five local offices into the building. The move is expected to be completed by late summer.

Sears Tower first opened in 1973 with the building's original occupant, Sears Roebuck and Co. Sears moved its headquarters to the Chicago suburb of Hoffman Estates in 1992.



Sears Tower, the tallest building in America, seen Thursday, March 12, 2008, in Chicago is going to be renamed Willis Tower after London-based Willis Group Holdings. The insurance broker announced the name change and other details of its agreement with the building's owners Thursday.

Associated Press

"We're saddened," Kim Freely, a spokeswoman for Sears Holdings Corp., said Thursday. □

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Forensic experts leave the Albrechtville school complex in Winnenden near Stuttgart, Germany, Wednesday, March 11, 2009. A 17-year-old gunman dressed in black opened fire at his former high school in southwestern Germany on Wednesday, killing at least 17 people before police shot him to death, state officials said. Nine students and three teachers were among the dead, State Interior Minister Heribert Rech said.

SHOES

Continued from Page 1

Some of his relatives collapsed and had to be helped out of the courthouse. Others were forcibly removed by guards after shouting “down with Bush” and “long live Iraq.” “This judiciary is unjust,” al-Zeidi’s brother, Dargham, said

Associated Press

tearfully.

Other family members shouted insults against Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

“The verdict came from al-Maliki, signed and sealed,” said one of al-Zeidi’s relatives who declined to give her name. She said her view was shared by the entire family.

Al-Zeidi’s brazen act, which occurred during a Dec. 14 news conference by Bush and al-Maliki, turned the young reporter into a folk hero in Iraq and across the Arab world, where the former president is reviled for his policies, especially the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Al-Zeidi belongs to Iraq’s majority Shiites, who rose to a position of power as a result of the U.S. toppling of Saddam Hussein, which brought to an end decades of Sunni domination. Still, the journalist has said he was angry over civilian suffering during the war.

The speed of his trial — two relatively brief hearings — is likely to feed widespread suspicion among Iraqis that al-Maliki’s government orchestrated the process, although defense lawyers said they had no evidence of any interference.

Reporters Without Borders, a Paris-based group dedicated

to the protection of journalists worldwide, condemned Thursday’s verdict. “The sentence is cynical in a country where so many of the people who kill journalists are never brought to justice. We call for his release,” it said in a statement.

Many Iraqis interviewed after the verdict believed the sentence was too harsh and that al-Zeidi was a hero for standing up to the American president.

During Thursday’s proceedings, chief defense attorney Dhia al-Saadi moved that the charges be dismissed, saying al-Zeidi’s act was “an expression of freedom” and was not a crime.

“It was an act of throwing a shoe not a rocket,” he told the court. “It was meant as an insult to the occupation.” Al-Zeidi, wearing a beige suit over a brown shirt and brown leather shoes, then entered a plea of not guilty.

Judge Abdul-Amir al-Rubaie

cleared the courtroom of all spectators and announced the verdict, which was relayed to reporters and family members by defense lawyers and a court official.

“At that moment, I saw nothing but Bush, and I felt the blood of the innocents flowing under his feet while he was smiling that smile,” defense lawyers quoted al-Zeidi as saying.

Court spokesman Abdul-Sattar Bayrkdar said al-Zeidi received the minimum sentence for the charge, which could have sent him to prison for 15 years. His lawyers said they would appeal.

“The sentence was unexpectedly harsh,” said Yehya al-Eitabi, one of some two dozen defense lawyers who attended Thursday’s hearing in a crowded courtroom.

A spokesman for the former U.S. president, Rob Saliterman, declined to comment on the conviction, saying only that “this is a matter for the Iraqi judicial system.” □



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| *matinee: saturday and sunday late show: friday and saturday | | | | | |
| AT RENAISSANCE - ORANJESTAD | | | | | |
| R | GRAN TORINO | daily: 4:50 matinee: 11:55 | 7:25 2:20 | 9:40 late show: 12:10 | NEW |
| R | FROST/NIXON | daily: 4:30 matinee: 1:55 | 7:00 | 9:30 late show: 12:00 | NEW |
| PG-13 | HE'S JUST NOT THAT INTO YOU | daily: 6:45 matinee: | 9:20 | late show: 11:55 | |
| PG | THE PINK PANTHER 2 | daily: 4:05 matinee: 12:00 | 6:20 2:05 | 8:20 late show: 12:25 | |
| R | THE INTERNATIONAL | daily: 4:55 matinee: 12:05 | 7:20 2:30 | 9:50 late show: 12:20 | |
| PG | HOTEL FOR DOGS | daily: 4:40 matinee: 12:20 | 2:25 | late show: | |
| PG | PAUL BLART: MALL COP | daily: 4:15 matinee: 12:10 | 6:20 2:15 | 8:20 late show: 12:15 | |
| AT PASEO HERENCIA | | | | | |
| R | GRAN TORINO | daily: 4:55 matinee: 12:00 | 7:15 2:30 | 9:45 late show: 12:10 | NEW |
| R | WATCHMEN | daily: 4:40 matinee: 1:15 | 8:00 | late show: 11:10 | NEW |
| PG-13 | TAKEN | daily: 4:10 matinee: 12:05 | 6:20 2:10 | 8:20 late show: 12:20 | |
| R | THE INTERNATIONAL | daily: 4:50 matinee: 11:55 | 7:20 2:25 | 9:50 late show: 12:15 | |
| PG | PAUL BLART: MALL COP | daily: 4:15 matinee: 12:10 | 6:10 2:15 | 8:10 late show: 12:25 | |
| PG | THE PINK PANTHER 2 | daily: 3:40 matinee: 1:40 | 5:50 | 7:50 late show: 12:00 | |
| DRIVE-IN March 12 - March 15 | | | | | |
| PG | HOTEL FOR DOGS | Thursday: 8:00 | Friday: 8:00 & 10:30 | | |
| PG | HOTEL FOR DOGS | Saturday: 8:00 & 10:30 | Sunday: 8:00 | | |

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Dutch police arrest seven suspected of planning attack

By TOBY STERLING

Associated Press Writer
AMSTERDAM (AP) —

Dutch police have arrested seven people suspected of preparing a terrorist attack in Amsterdam, including a relative of one of the attackers who died in the 2004 bombings in Madrid.

Mayor Job Cohen said police were acting on an anonymous tip that warned an Ikea outlet or other stores in the southeast of the city might be targeted. "It wasn't a regular bomb warning, but a warning of a planned action aimed at creating casualties in shops," Cohen said late Thursday.

"Men were planning to put explosives in the shops and wanted to cause casualties in busy places," he said.

Police received the tip Wednesday night from an unregistered cell phone in Belgium. The tip also included names of one suspect and locations for police to search. Early Thursday, authorities shut down a major Amsterdam shopping street near the Arena soccer stadium and sealed off the nearby Ikea store. A concert by the American band "The Killers" was canceled.

District Attorney Herman Bolhaar said six men and one woman, aged 19-64, were

arrested in Amsterdam. All are Dutch nationals of Moroccan ancestry.

"As far as we can tell, none involved has a history of terrorist involvement," he said at a news conference, though one suspect is related to "a person who exactly five years ago was involved in the attack in Madrid."

Police Commissioner Bernard Welten said the suspect's relative died shortly after the Madrid attacks "as a result of a suicide action."

Names of the suspects were not released.

Law enforcement officials in Belgium and the Netherlands have raided a number of houses in the investigation. Police declined to say whether any explosives were found.

The Dutch anti-terrorism coordinator's office said national threat levels had not been changed as a result of Thursday's events.

Dutch police give directions to shoppers after sealing off a major shopping street in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Thursday March 12, 2009. Dutch police say they arrested seven people on suspicion of preparing a terrorist attack in Amsterdam including a relative of one of the attackers who died in the 2004 bombings in Madrid. Earlier Thursday authorities had sealed off a major Amsterdam shopping street as a result of the threat, while police conducted house searches. District Attorney Herman Bolhaar says those arrested include six men and one woman, aged 19-64. All are Dutch nationals of Moroccan ancestry.

Associated Press

Welten said he believed the arrests had "reduced the immediate threat" of an attack in Amsterdam, but that further arrests could not be ruled out. He said the area around the Ikea store was likely to remain sealed Friday. □



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At Papillon Restaurant in The Village Henri Charrière would have had the time of his life



PALM BEACH - Henri Charrière, one of the world's most famous prisoners, would surely have had the time of his life at Papillon Restaurant in The Village, across from the Radisson Resort. Nicknamed Papillon because of the butterfly tattoo on his chest, the Frenchman was the first convict to escape from Devil's Island, something that nobody had ever done before. Charrière's thrilling, gripping autobiography has been the concept behind Papillon Restaurant. The décor, the decorations and especially the restrooms wink

at the thirteen terrible years Papillon spent in prison in French Guyana.

Papillon Restaurant's menu reflects the Frenchman's arduous journey to freedom: classic French dishes have been dusted with daring Caribbean flair and are a culinary journey for your taste buds. The spacious outside terrace is perfect for casual fine dining; the

iron bars, flecks of rust and stains on the walls make one very glad not to be in Papillon's shoes in the 1940's! Charrière would undoubtedly have loved 'his' place on Aruba: this is luxury living for anyone!

Papillon's opening hours are from 5 pm until midnight. The restaurant's daily specials will be explained by the staff. For reservations, please call 5865400.



Papillon RESTAURANT

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SPORTS

Aruba TODAY



Mickelson in the lead as Tiger sputters at Doral

By DOUG FERGUSON

AP Golf Writer

DORAL, Florida (AP) — Phil Mickelson can't recall ever hitting the ball this long or having a short game this superb, and it showed when he chipped in three times on his way to a 7-under 65 for a share of the lead in the CA Championship on Thursday.

Tiger Woods had few complaints about his game, but he sure didn't get the same results.

In his first stroke-play event since winning the U.S. Open last summer, Woods managed only three birdies on a Blue Monster course where he has never finished out of the top 10. He wound up with a 71 to tie for 40th in an 80-man field.

"It was not like I was playing poorly and shot 71," Woods said. "I played well and just didn't make any putts."

The problem for him was just about everyone else did.

Jeev Milkha Singh ran off five birdies in a six-hole span around the turn and was the first player to post a 65 on a balmy, breezy afternoon. Relief



Golfer Phil Mickelson hits out of the sand on the second hole during the first round at the CA Championship golf tournament, Thursday March 12, 2009, in Doral, Fla.

Associated Press

Goosen, switching back to a conventional putter, ran off eight birdies in his round of 65. And the real surprise was Prayad Marksaeng of Thailand,

who birdied eight of his first 12 holes to join the leaders.

The group one shot behind included British Open and U.S. PGA champion Padraig

Harrington, who didn't feel as though he did much of anything right and had his best score of the year.

"I think I hit two fairways with

my driver today. So it's not like I played good golf or anything like that," Harrington said. "It was all about the score."

For Mickelson, it was mostly about his finish.

He hit into the water on No. 3 and took double bogey, found the water again on the par-3 fourth hole and chipped in for par. Mickelson was even through eight holes and was hopeful of a good back nine that would allow him a chance on Friday to get into contention.

Three hours later, he already was there.

After trying to drive the 355-yard 16th hole, he pitched up to 3 feet for birdie. Then he chipped in from short of the green on the 17th, and made it three straight birdies by chipping in from about 25 feet on the 18th.

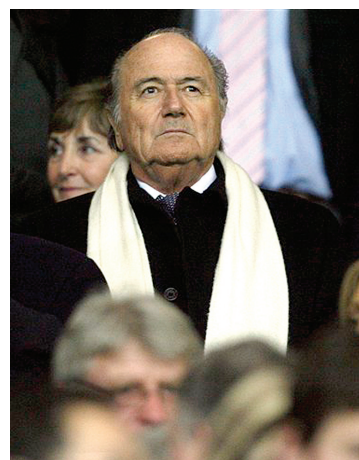
"It was just nice to see the ball go in the hole," Mickelson said. Woods didn't have many close looks at birdie, picking up two of them on par 5s and the other one with a 7-iron that stopped a foot from the hole on the par-3 15th hole.

"Today I was trying to figure it out, how to get the ball in the hole a little bit faster than what I was doing," Woods said.

Consider this a slow start. It's one thing to be six shots behind after the opening round, quite another when 35 players separated him from the top of the leaderboard, a familiar position for Woods at Doral.

"You are going to have days like today," Woods said. "And I would be obviously a little bit more disappointed, a little more frustrated, if I had not played well. I felt like I hit the ball well, hit putts well, but they just didn't go in. I have to be a little bit sharper tomorrow. Hopefully, those putts go in tomorrow and the score will be a little different."

Sean O'Hair began his round with consecutive eagles and was among the group at 67. Henrik Stenson played a shot from the mucky water on the third hole after taking off everything but his boxer shorts and his golf club. He shot a 69. □



FIFA President Sepp Blatter is seen in the stands before the Manchester United and Inter Milan Champions League second round, second leg, soccer match at Old Trafford Stadium, Manchester, England, Wednesday, March 11, 2009. Blatter said Wednesday the organization will remain in a "comfortable situation" until 2010, but is braced for a bleaker financial outlook after that when deals for future tournaments must be negotiated.

Associated Press

Blatter: MLS should switch to traditional schedule

By ROB HARRIS

AP Sports Writer

MANCHESTER, England (AP) — FIFA president Sepp Blatter wants Major League Soccer to switch to a traditional schedule that starts in late summer and ends in the late spring.

Currently, several MLS teams share stadiums with NFL teams and don't have access to arenas on many weekends in the autumn. The schedule creates difficulty when players transfer from MLS to Europe and back and causes MLS matches to be played on days set aside by FIFA for national teams.

"American football plays in winter, so they can only play from March to October, which means you are not in the right season," Blatter said on Wednesday. "The best American players are playing here, and this is the basic problem with the MLS."

MLS has said it hopes to eventually make the switch but it can't for now because it shares

several stadiums with NFL teams. Eight MLS teams are in football stadiums built for the league, two share with NFL teams that are controlled by the same owners as the football club, and New York shares with NFL teams through 2009 before moving into its own stadium.

DC United plays in a city-owned ground where it was the primary tenant, Houston was at the University of Houston's college football stadium and San Jose and Kansas City are at temporary homes.

"This league was founded after the 1994 World Cup, but is still struggling to get the position they should have according to the number of football players there are in the United States," Blatter said.

"It has the highest number of young players in any sport. But the league has not found yet its position. It can only find its position if the league has its own stadiums." □

These Dutchmen sure fly in world 'honkbal' classic

By IAN HARRISON
For The Associated Press

In sports, the Netherlands is better known for football, speedskating and cycling. "Honkbal," as baseball is called in Dutch, is hardly the national pastime.

Yet, the Netherlands has been the great surprise at the World Baseball Classic by reaching the second round with two jolting wins over the powerful Dominican Republic.

The Dominican roster featured Major League Baseball stars such as David Ortiz, Jose Reyes, Hanley Ramirez and Pedro Martinez, but they were beaten 3-2 in 11 innings on

Tuesday.

The Netherlands lost to Puerto Rico 5-0 on Wednesday, but it was already guaranteed a berth in the second round, where it will start against Venezuela on Saturday in Miami.

One of the Dutch team's most avid observers will be United States coach Davey Johnson, who coached many of the Dutch players in 2003 and 2004, when he helped lead them to a European championship and an Olympic berth.

"I know them real well," Johnson said this week.

"There's some new players but there's still a lot of the

same guys that I had. To see them pull off two great wins against the Dominicans, I was real proud of them."

Calling the Netherlands "the Yankees of Europe," Johnson was less surprised than many by the team's success. But international achievement was still somewhat of a shock for a country where, as Johnson readily admits, professional baseball was "basically a part-time job."

He said frequent games against Cuba over the years helped steel the Netherlands for tough tests at the Classic.

"Their backs are always against the wall," Johnson



Netherlands' players celebrate after defeating the Dominican Republic 2-1 in the eleventh inning of a World Baseball Classic game in San Juan, Tuesday, March 10, 2009. Netherlands advanced to round two and the Dominicans were eliminated.

Associated Press

said. "They've learned to compete against good teams, good hitters. When they went up against the Dominicans I'm sure they didn't feel intimidated. They felt like they could find a way to win being the underdog."

Johnson spent 14 years in the majors and another 14 as a manager, winning a World Series with the New York Mets in 1986. Fired by the Los Angeles Dodgers after the 2000 season, Johnson headed home to Florida, saying he was "completely burned out from baseball."

Then an agent called in 2003, saying the Netherlands needed someone to step in for Robert Eenhoorn, a one-time Yankees and Los Angeles Angels infielder who was managing the Dutch. Eenhoorn's 6-year-old son, Ryan, was dying of cancer.

"I couldn't say no," Johnson said. "I don't know anybody who could say no under that circumstance." The day he arrived, Johnson led his new team through a workout.

The next day, he escorted the players to Ryan Eenhoorn's funeral. Weeks later, with a grieving Robert back in the dugout, the Netherlands beat Greece 2-0 to claim

the European title. Johnson became Eenhoorn's bench coach and stayed with the team through the 2004 Athens Olympics.

Seeing baseball played, and enjoyed, in countries like France, Spain and Russia renewed Johnson's passion for the game.

"It was a very enjoyable experience," Johnson said. "To know that these countries even had baseball, I couldn't believe. It was just wonderful. I love baseball and it brought back a lot of good memories. It was really something in my life. At that time, it was really important for me."

"It's amazing to see these countries that you would never even think had a ball team," Johnson said. "I mean, Czech Republic, are you kidding me? They have a great facility there."

He also got a kick out of the differences. In the Netherlands, 'honkbal' games are alive with music and family picnics.

"It's a totally different environment, a ball game over there, for the fans," Johnson said. "It's kind of like a football game is going on. They're partying at the game more than they're watching the game." □

Orlando Magic clinch playoff berth

ORLANDO, Florida (AP)

— The Orlando Magic clinched an NBA playoff spot by beating the Chicago Bulls 107-79 with a big boost from the bench on Wednesday.

Securing a playoff berth has been a formality for more than a month for the Magic. And they'll almost surely lock up a second consecutive Southeast Division title in the next few weeks, having started the day with a 10½ game lead over Atlanta.

Tony Battie had 18 points and eight rebounds, J.J. Redick had 13 points, and Marcin Gortat added 13 points and 15 rebounds in reserve for the Magic, who have won five of their last six games.

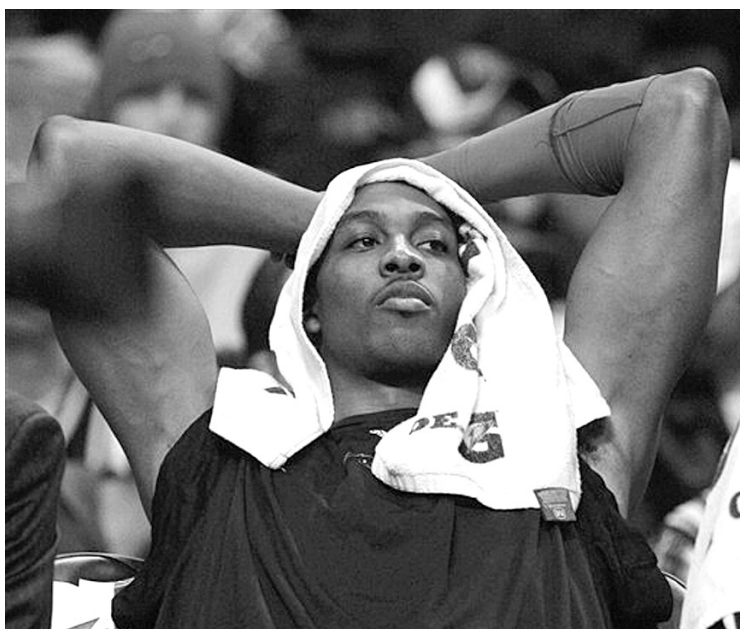
John Salmons had 18 points and eight rebounds, and Brad Miller added 11 points for Chicago, which shot a mere 31.4 percent from the floor and had 18 turnovers.

Heat 107, Celtics 99

At Miami, Dwyane Wade scored 32 points, including the game-sealing 3-pointer with 34 seconds left, as Miami held on to beat Boston.

Jamario Moon scored 13 points and grabbed eight rebounds for Miami, which stayed 1½ games behind Atlanta for fourth place in the Eastern Conference. Jermaine O'Neal scored 12 for the Heat.

Ray Allen hit his first six shots and finished with 27 for Boston, which fell two games behind Cleveland for the



Orlando Magic center Dwight Howard sits on the bench during the closing moments of their NBA basketball game and 120-102 loss to the Chicago Bulls in Chicago, Tuesday, Feb. 24, 2009.

East's best record. Leon Powe had 23 points and 13 rebounds for the Celtics, who have lost two straight.

Hawks 100, Jazz 93

At Atlanta, Joe Johnson scored 31 points and Josh Smith had 22 points and 12 rebounds to help Atlanta end Utah's 12-game winning streak.

Flip Murray scored 11 of his 16 points in the fourth quarter for the Hawks, who have won three straight. Smith ended

the scoring with a pair of free throws with 24 seconds remaining.

Deron Williams led the Jazz with 20 points and nine assists.

Hornets 109, Wizards 98

At Washington, Chris Paul compiled his NBA-leading sixth triple-double with 30 points, 13 assists and 10 rebounds, steering New Orleans over Washington. □

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Carolina Hurricanes' goalie Cam Ward watches as the shot by the Chicago Blackhawks' Kris Versteeg flies by for the game-winning goal during the shootout of an NHL Hockey game Wednesday, March 11, 2009, in Chicago. The Blackhawks defeated the Hurricanes 3-2 in a shootout.

Associated Press

NHL Roundup

Kris Versteeg leads Blackhawks to win

CHICAGO (AP) — Kris Versteeg broke a tie in the fourth round of a shootout as the Chicago Blackhawks beat Carolina 3-2 on Wednesday to end the Hurricanes' winning streak at four games.

With Carolina on a power play and goalie Cam Ward off for an extra attacker, the Hurricanes' Tuomo Ruutu scored with 26.5 seconds left in regulation to tie at 2.

Chicago's Jonathan Toews and Ruutu traded goals to open the shootout. And then the Blackhawks' Patrick Kane and Carolina's Jussi Jokinen also scored to keep it even.

After both teams failed on their next attempts, Versteeg beat Ward to give the Blackhawks the advantage. Chicago goalie Cristobal Huet then stopped Sergei Samsonov as the Blackhawks raced to the ice to celebrate the win.

Versteeg and Troy Brouwer scored in regulation for Chicago.

Rod Brind'Amour also scored for Carolina. With the point for the regulation tie, Carolina tied Pittsburgh for sixth place in the Eastern Conference with 78 points, although the Hurricanes have one more loss than the Penguins.

Senators 3, Lightning 2, OT

At Ottawa, Mike Fisher beat Karri Ramo off a rebound at 2:38 of overtime to give Ottawa a win over Tampa Bay for its fourth straight victory.

Brian Elliott made 22 saves for his fourth victory in a row, and Ryan Shannon and Chris Kelly scored in regulation. Cory Murphy and Adam Hall scored for Tampa Bay, and Ramo stopped 24 shots. The Lightning have lost four straight and 15 of 19.

Ducks 4, Canucks 3, OT

At Anaheim, California, Scott Niedermayer scored at 3:37 of overtime as Anaheim beat Vancouver

Petteri Nokelainen, Teemu Selanne and Ryan Getzlaf also scored, while newcomers Erik Christensen, Ryan Whitney each had two assists, and Jonas Hiller made 32 saves to help the Ducks snap a three-game losing streak.

Anaheim had two other goals disallowed, one by Whitney because the puck went in through the side of the net, the other by Christensen because of a penalty against Ryan Getzlaf for goalie interference.

Alex Burrows, Kyle Wellwood and Ryan Kesler scored for Vancouver. □



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Arqueólogos descubren raros relieves mayas en Guatemala

CIUDAD DE GUATEMALA (Reuters) - Arqueólogos descubrieron en la selva del norte de Guatemala paneles de estuco tallados que describen monstruos cósmicos, dioses y serpientes, las más antiguas representaciones que se conocen del libro sagrado de los mayas.

Los dos paneles, hallados recientemente apilados uno sobre otro, ambos de unos ocho metros de largo, fueron creados alrededor del año 300 A.C. y muestran escenas del Popol Vuh.

A los investigadores les tomó tres meses llegar a los tallados mientras excavaban en El Mirador, la ciudad maya más grande del mundo, dijo el miércoles Richard Hansen, quien dirige las investigaciones en el sitio.

Los mayas construyeron templos y palacios en Centroamérica y el sur de



El arqueólogo Richard Hansen habla sobre dos paneles de los mayas descubiertos en el norte de Guatemala, 7 mar 2009. REUTERS/Eduardo González SCSPR

México, dominando la región durante 2,000 años, antes de abandonar misteriosamente sus ciudades aproximadamente

en el año 900 D.C.

La cuenca de El Mirador quedó abandonada mucho antes con una gran población urbana que dejó una compleja red de caminos y canales y una enorme pirámide que estaba bajo una densa vegetación.

La más antigua versión escrita del Popol Vuh fue descubierta a inicios del Siglo XVIII por un

sacerdote español y los paneles son los primeros relieves conocidos que describen a los principales personajes de la mitología maya, dos gemelos héroes, dijo Hansen.

“Esto es pre-cristiano, tiene una tremenda antigüedad y muestra otra vez la notable resistencia de una ideología que existió durante miles

de años”, dijo Hansen, un arqueólogo de la Universidad de Idaho que ha trabajado en El Mirador por más de una década.

Sobre uno de los paneles, los gemelos están rodeados de monstruos cósmicos y encima de ellos está una deidad ave con las alas extendidas.

En el otro panel está un dios maya del maíz enmarcado por una serpiente ondulante, dijo Hansen, quien trabajó como asesor para la filmación de la película de Mel Gibson sobre los mayas “Apocalypto”. Extendido sobre una superficie de más de 2,000 kilómetros cuadrados, El Mirador tiene tres veces el tamaño de la famosa zona arqueológica de Tikal en Guatemala, un popular destino de turistas. Pero la conservación de El Mirador está amenazada por narcotraficantes que usan el área para transportar cocaína y heroína a través de la porosa frontera con México, la deforestación, saqueadores que roban artefactos antiguos para venderlos en el mercado negro y cazadores de animales salvajes. □

Crisis laboral pone en jaque a automotrices Venezuela

CARACAS (Reuters) - Josmar, una oficinista de Caracas, lleva más de cinco meses intentando comprar un auto. Tiene el dinero, pero un coctel de medidas del Gobierno y protestas sindicales la ha mantenido en espera y mientras tanto el precio del vehículo ha subido más del 60 por ciento.

Las ensambladoras de Toyota, Mitsubishi y Hyundai en Venezuela están paralizadas por conflictos laborales, mientras que las autoridades han limitado la importación y acentuado la escasez de vehículos nuevos en un mercado con alta demanda.

Las protestas de los trabajadores han detenido un 25 por ciento de la producción total de autos del país latinoamericano, profundizando la crisis local de un sector que ya vio reducidas sus ventas a casi la mitad durante el 2008, luego de varios años continuos marcando récord.

Los automóviles son usados en Venezuela como refugio de capital debido a su alta revalorización en el mercado secundario, que llega a superar la galopante inflación en el país sudamericano, debido a la escasez de opciones para invertir y acentuada por un control de cambios que impide sacar divisas al exterior.

La planta local de Toyota, la tercera mayor por ventas en el país, dejó de producir 210 unidades diarias tras ser bloqueada la semana pasada por un grupo de trabajadores que exigen mejoras contractuales. El desempeño de Toyota en Venezuela ya bajó en el 2008 debido a retrasos para recibir divisas por el control de cambio vigente en el país y fallas en la recepción de piezas. □

Vicepresidente de EEUU en gira por Latinoamérica

SAN JOSE (AP) - El vicepresidente estadounidense Joe Biden se reunirá con los presidentes centroamericanos durante una visita oficial a Costa Rica.

“La visita del vicepresidente Biden es una clara muestra de un renovado interés del gobierno de Estados Unidos hacia sus socios y vecinos más próximos”, dijo el jueves el presidente Oscar Arias el jueves después de participar en un acto oficial.

Añadió que, “a pocas semanas de la V Cumbre de las Américas (en Trinidad y Tobago), en la cual espero coincidir con el presidente Barack Obama, esta importante visita nos ofrece una valiosa oportunidad previa de diálogo y concertación con el gobierno de Estados Unidos”.

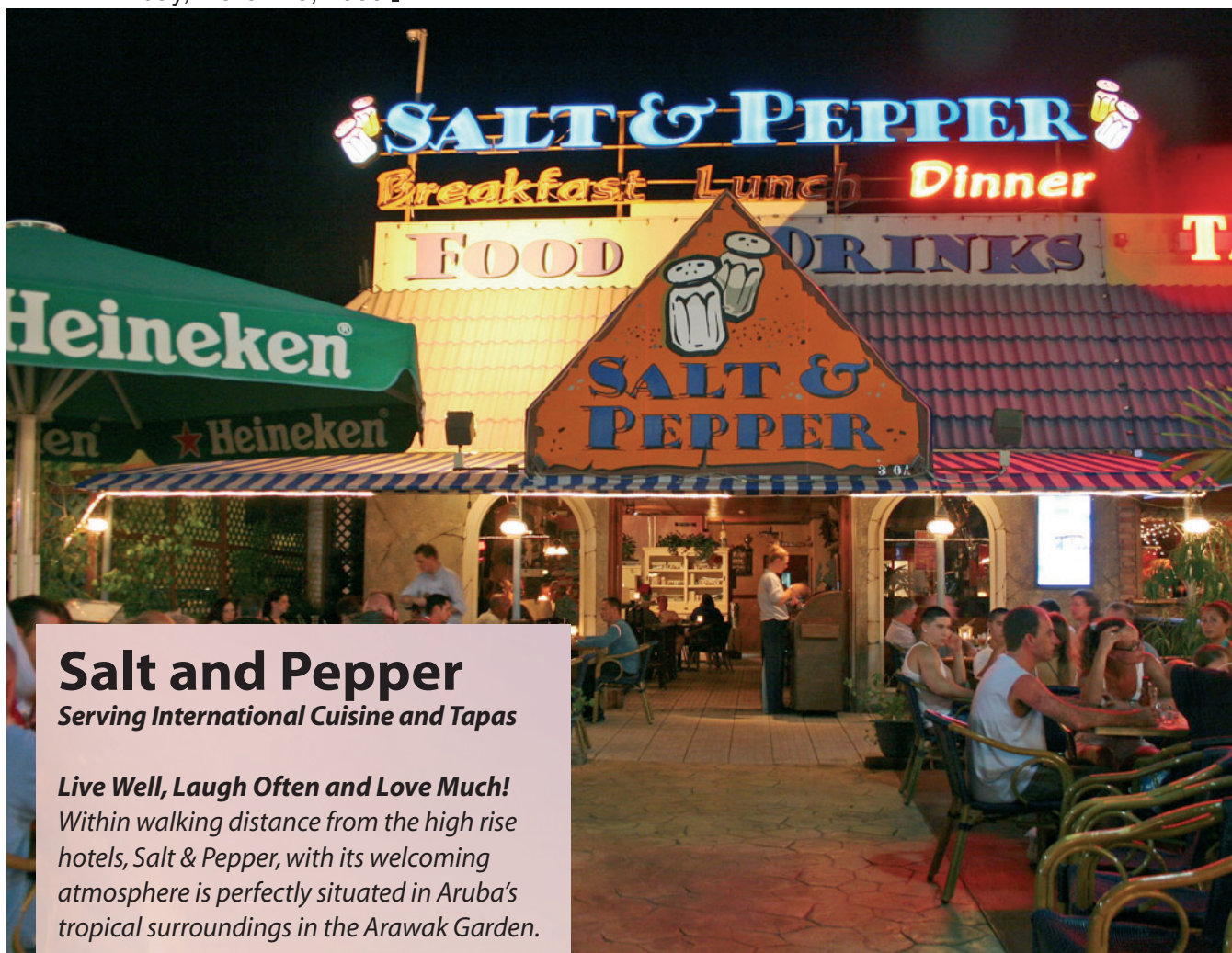
El canciller Bruno Stagno dijo a la AP que “lo que se tiene previsto es una visita bilateral el domingo 29 y el lunes 30 estaríamos convocando

a una reunión de presidentes centroamericanos que abarcaría además a Panamá y Belice”.

A la cita además estará convidado el ganador de las elecciones presidenciales en El Salvador, que se realizarán el 15 de marzo.

Un comunicado de Casa Presidencial señaló que Biden estará acompañado por su esposa Jill y se convertirá “en el más alto dignatario estadounidense que llega a Costa Rica desde la visita del presidente Bill Clinton en mayo de 1997”.

La nota apuntó que Biden estará previamente en Santiago de Chile, donde se reunirá con varios presidentes de América de Sur el 27 y 28 de marzo. El vicepresidente estadounidense también viajará a México antes de la cita en Sudamérica para reunirse con el mandatario Felipe Calderón y asistir al partido de fútbol entre las selecciones de ambos países por la clasificación al mundial del 2010. □



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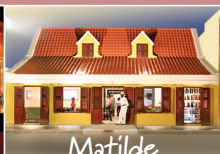
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